

The Hillcole Group of Radical Left Educators

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The Hillcole Group of Radical Left Educators was founded in June 1989. In this chapter I want to describe the Hillcole Group of Radical Left Educators- its aims, its changing membership, the phases in the content and mode of its writing and other activities, and the two Hillcole books and ten booklets themselves. I also want to address some issues that arise from its history and trajectory, and to evaluate the particular and limited nature of its impact.

FOUNDING THE HILLCOLE GROUP

The Hillcole Group of Radical Left Educators was founded in Dave Hill and Mike Cole as founded as a group of socialist practitioners and academics in education in Britain. It was called 'Hillcole' because the names of the two founders mirrored the name of the Hillgate Group, at the time a hugely influential radical Right publishing group.

Our three published aims, as stated in our founding statement were threefold: 1. to improve the quality of schooling and teacher education; 2. to respond rapidly to the assaults by the radical right on the quality of education; and 3. to influence policy and decision making on educational matters.

The Hillcole Group engaged in a variety of public activities. These were, publishing books and booklets, holding conferences, contributing to wider Left events and conferences, establishing a public space and public support for radical left educators, students, and others to identify and interact with, and establishing an emotional and intellectual support and collaborative network for its members. We liked being members. We valued it, to greater or lesser degrees.

All the Hillcole publications- two books and eleven Hillcole booklets (Hillcole Papers)- were published by Tufnell Press, whose publishers were Robert Arbury and Janet Holland. (www.tpress.free-online.co.uk). In many ways, although he did not attend meetings, Robert was a key support for the Hillcole Group in that he was our supportive publisher.

Although in some respects there were overlapping periods in an analysis of the phases in the development of the Hillcole Group, it is possible to identify four periods. These relate firstly to the focus of our activities (written analysis and critique, written policy development, pan-Left conference and activist activity). They relate secondly to phases in our mode of working. We moved from the singly authored and small group authored booklets of 1989-91, to books and booklets written collaboratively by the Group as a whole through the 1990s. At the end of the 1990s and into the new century, we moved into to single and small group writing within the Hillcole Group, combined with wider political activity such as organising and participating in national conferences with other activist groups such as the Socialist teachers Association (STA) and the Promoting Comprehensive Education Network (PCEN).

PHASE ONE: THATCHERISM 1989-91

Political Context

In 1989, the contemporary context of the formation of this group was that the late 1980s had seen the Thatcher governments turn their systematic attention to their 'revolution in education'- in particular with respect to the organisation/ structure of schooling, the school curriculum, Local Education Authorities and teacher education. These, by 1989, had resulted in The 1988 Education Reform Act, and various sets of proposals regarding teacher education. The radical right-wing Hillgate Group's three booklets on schooling, LEAs and teacher education (Hillgate Group 1996, 1997, 1989) reflected and influenced Conservative Party Conference and Ministerial (and Prime Ministerial) views of and plans for education. So too did the torrent of articles and summaries of neo-liberal and neo-conservative booklets and beliefs regularly appearing in the daily and Sunday versions of *Telegraph*, the *Times* and *The Mail*. (See Simon, 1994; Chitty, 1989, 1999, 2002; Jones, 1989, 2003; Hill, 1989, 1990, 1997, 2001a, b; Hill, Cole and Williams, 1997; Tomlinson, 2001).

This was a time when the Inner London Education Authority, the most progressive local education authority, on issues of 'race', sex and class discrimination, was abolished, Trade Unions had been 'tamed' in the aftermath of the defeat of 'The Great Miners' Strike' of 1984-85', and a blatantly neo-conservative national curriculum had been imposed on schools, in effect, despite the fig-leaf of the (themselves partisan) National Curriculum Council Subject Working Parties, the work of ministerial diktat and ideological determination. It was thus a time when the ideological state apparatuses of education and the media, and the repressive state apparatuses of the law and its agents- combined to subdue and marginalise socialist and Marxist activity in education and elsewhere.

In Ken Jones' words, 'Hillcole came together in a particularly difficult period - a period of trade union defeat, and a period in which academics were (for various objective reasons, 'drawing into themselves'. Not only that, but this was a time when the Left, for example those in schools, further education, higher education were being populistically depicted and vilified as 'loony left' and were subject to various forms of harassment and non-preferment (See, for example Mike Cole's chapter in this book, and Hill, 1997b, c, 2001b).

Membership

The initial group of nine members of Hillcole were those who Mike Cole and I had worked. Most were people that Mike Cole had co-written with in the past. (He had recently edited three books on Marxist theory and on education and equality. (See Cole 1988, 1989a, 1989b).

The nine original members of the Hillcole Group on its formation in 1989 were Stephen Ball (then Professor of Education at the Centre for Educational Studies, Kings College, London); Caroline Benn (Lecturer in Adult Education specialising in Access Course for Entry into Higher Education); Mike Cole (then Senior Lecturer in the Department of Primary Education at Brighton Polytechnic); Ann-Marie Davies, (then Deputy Director, Language Division, ILEA Centre for Urban Educational Studies); Dave Hill (then Senior Lecturer in Education at West Sussex Institute of

Higher Education); Tamara Jakubowski (then Lecturer in Education at Middlesex Polytechnic); Jan Lee (then Senior Lecturer in Education at Goldsmiths College University of London) and Rehana Minhas, Director of the Community Division, ILEA Centre for Urban Educational Studies) and Janet Holland, then lecturing and researching at the Open University and the London University Institute of Education.

As a result of the first few meetings of the Group, a number of other members joined the group. These were John Clay (then Senior Lecturer in the Department of Primary Education at Brighton Polytechnic, Clyde Chitty (then Lecturer in education at Birmingham University), Rosalyn George (then senior Lecturer in Education at West Sussex Institute in Higher Education), Andy Green (then lecturer in Post-16 Education at London University Institute of Education), Ken Jones (then Lecturer in Education at London University Institute of Education), Meg Maguire (Senior Lecturer in Education at Roehampton Institute of Higher education, and Gaby Weiner, (then Senior Lecturer in Education at South Bank Polytechnic).

These were people recommended at the early meetings by various members- Caroline Benn in particular, on the basis of her lifetime in Left education politics and organisation- and also colleagues who were known to Mike Cole and me through Trade Union and other left activist activities in the 1980s- for example Mike, Gaby Weiner and I were members of the Southern Regional Council of NATFHE (the National Association of Teachers and Lecturers in Higher Education), and Rosalyn George and John Clay were active with Mike Cole and me in the late 1980s in the Anti-Racist Teacher Education Network (ARTEN). Indeed, under the good offices of Jane Lane, initial meetings were held at the Commission for Racial Equality, the site of the ARTEN meetings. Others, such as Pat Ainley (then Senior Lecturer in Education at Thames Polytechnic) contacted the Group as a result of publicity in the *Times Educational Supplement* for the first Hillcole booklet, *Charge of the Right Brigade*. (At that time various Hillcole booklets were receiving publicity in *The Times Educational Supplement*). This, then, was the original Hillcole Group through the late 1980s and the early 1990s.

Two new tranches of members were to join in the early 1990s and, in the late 1990s, a group more directly involved as current activists within politically and union organisations. A group also left, the only time this was to happen, over differences in analysis. A number of others, such as Debbie Epstein and Gus John, also attended a single meeting before deciding it wasn't for them. However, as various members note in their comments below, the Hillcole Group was remarkable in that it did not fissure, and integrated, usually harmoniously, a series of diverse personalities and political analyses and backgrounds.

Hillcole Publications

The early publications of the Hillcole Group were largely focused on one of its three aims. This aim was, 'to respond quickly to assaults on the quality of education from the Radical Right'. The early booklets attempted to combat Radical Right ideology and policy on education and more widely, to critique their theories and policies, and to analyse and expose the ways these were affecting schooling, further education and teacher education.

During this period, the Hillcole Group published, through Tufnell Press, the following, usually individually written, booklets:

- Hillcole Paper 1 (1989) was Dave Hill's *Charge of the Right Brigade: The Radical Right's Attack on Teacher Education*
- Hillcole Paper 2 (1990) was Ann Marie Davies, Janet Holland and Rehana Minhas' *Equal Opportunities in the new ERA*
- Hillcole Paper 3 (1990) was Dave Hill's *Something Old, something new, something borrowed, something blue: Schooling, teacher education and the Radical Right in Britain and the USA*
- Hillcole Paper 4 (1990) was Pat Ainley's *Training turns to Enterprise: Vocational education in the market place*
- Hillcole Paper 5 (1990) was Stephen Ball's *Markets Morality and Education*.

PHASE TWO: PLANNING FOR A LABOUR GOVERNMENT 1991-1994

Advising (Old) Labour on Education Policy

This next phase of Hillcole Group writing, was the development of policy proposals across education. It also saw Hillcole members being invited to participate in a series of education advisory meetings with Labour Shadow Ministers and Policy development groups. Thus, I met Andrew Smith MP, then a Shadow Minister of Education, following Press publicity for *Charge of the Right Brigade* (Hill, 1989), Meg Maguire, John Clay and I met members of an Labour Party Advisory Committee on teacher education in Millbank, and I had a meeting with Colin Pickthall MP, who was developing teacher education policy for Labour. (He, too, had made contact after the press publicity).

It thus seemed, that another of the Hillcole Group's aims, 'to influence policy and decision making on educational matters' was in with a chance of being realised, in that it was starting to become one of a number of socialist education groups being invited to give advice to a future Labour government.

This phase, and this advisory function, ended in 1994. It was prior to David Blunkett's New Labour education policy shift from Old Labour to New Labour, which followed Tony Blair's election as Leader of the Labour Party, and the consequent New Labour ban on the 'S' word (Socialism) and socialist policies as from that date. (Pickthall's efforts were disowned and overtaken by Blunkett. See Hill, 1996. The next time I saw him, some months later, he told me he shouldn't be seen talking to people like me. There were no more invitations for the Hillcole Group to advise the Labour Party).

Collaborative Writing and Publications

The period of 1991-1994 was one, which saw intense collective writing and collaboration between the co-writers, with, on some occasions, every sentence and paragraph being fought over, discussed, and developed collaboratively. This style of comradely intense argument and debate was to become a feature for the next few years of Hillcole writing. The first Hillcole book came to epitomise a qualitative change in Hillcole writing- the collaborative co-written and co-argued publication developed during Hillcole Group meetings, then being held at the London University Institute of Education.

By the time the first of the two Hillcole Group books on Education, *Changing the Future: Redprint for Education* was published in 1991, the Hillcole Group comprised the following thirteen members and co-writers: Pat Ainley, Stephen Ball,

Caroline Benn, Clyde Chitty, Mike Cole, John Clay, Andy Green, Dave Hill, Janet Holland, Tamara Jakubowska (later Sivanandan), Ken Jones, Rehana Minhas and Gaby Weiner.

In Glenn Rikowski's view

Changing the Future: Redprint for Education (1991) still constitutes the most comprehensive and significant attempt from the educational Left to offer an *alternative* education strategy. It was clear, from the experience of writing *Redprint* that we had not only to critique and expose the degeneration of the educational system but also offer radical alternatives. There is no doubt that Caroline's insight and vision was the catalyst that expanded the mission of the Hillcole Group substantially during the early to mid-1990s. Whilst she obviously acknowledged the need for critique of education policies that increased social inequality, policies designed to suppress expectations and subsume education under a business agenda for neoliberalism, she also stressed the need to offer alternatives. The Group moved forward on the basis of Caroline's outlook, and from the mid-1990s we became more confident, less defensive and more forward-looking. She encouraged the Group towards exploring prospects for the new century. The confident stance that Caroline fired generated the confidence to 'put ourselves on the line', and to express our shared principles and ideas regarding the foundations of the sort of education system, work organisation and society we all yearned for and believed was necessary for human survival and liberation.

While Hillcole booklets had been overwhelmingly analytical in the first phase of 1989-1991, the publications now became much more policy oriented. Thus, in addition to the wide-ranging policy proposals in *Changing the Future: Redprint for Education*, the next Hillcole booklet contained a detailed set of Radical left policy proposals for teacher education.

- Hillcole Paper 6 (1991) was Dave Hill's *What's Left in teacher education*.

During the early 1990s, Imelda Gardiner (a former teacher educator who was a peripatetic teacher), Shane Blackman, (senior lecturer in Sociology at Christ Church College, Canterbury), Julian Wooton (a London school teacher) and Glenn Rikowski, (Research Fellow in Education at Birmingham University), joined the Hillcole Group. Glenn Rikowski had been studying with Dave Hill at the London University Institute of Education in 1993. A number of the new members joined with original members to co-write the two booklets:

- Hillcole Paper 7 (1993) *Falling Apart: the coming crisis of Conservative education*, written by Pat Ainley, Caroline Benn, Shane Blackman, John Clay, Mike Cole, Imelda Gardiner, Andy Green, Dave Hill, Janet Holland and Ken Jones.
- Hillcole Paper 9 (1993) was *Whose Teachers: a radical manifesto*, written by John Clay, Mike Cole, Dave Hill, Ros George, Meg Maguire, Imelda Gardiner (with comments by Caroline Benn, Shane Blackman, Andy Green, Janet Holland and Gaby Weiner).

This last booklet was deliberately written in a punchy, short-sentence style, copying the style and indeed the structure (and even many of the sub-headings) of the right-wing Hillgate Group booklet of 1989, *Learning to Teach*. This was in an attempt to try out a less academic style of booklet, to meet criticisms from within the Hillcole

Group (for example from Pat Ainley) that the booklets were inaccessible to a wider audience. We also wanted to see if such a booklet would attract the media coverage that had disappeared in the early 1990s. It didn't. The media, in particular the *Times Educational Supplement*, steadfastly ignored Hillcole Press releases and phone calls, unlike in the former period.

PHASE THREE: NEW LABOUR IN OPPOSITION 1994-1997

This was indeed a dire time for Left activists. Within the Labour Party and to an extent outside it, many Leftists bit their lips at the prospect of the electable Tony Blair actually being successful in defeating the Conservatives at a general election for the first time since 1979. Labour Party Branch meetings throughout the country voted to 'Trust Tony' through a whole series of reversals of Labour Party policy. The Labour Party organisation was remodelled and emasculated, Tony talked tough on Trade Unions (restricting them, that is), and acted tough in the Parliamentary selection process. New Labour policy and ideology ruled rampant. Swathes of Left activists left the Party and a number were expelled. New non-socialist recruits flooded in. The Labour Party changed in ideology, in membership, in education policy.

When New Labour launched its new education policy document in 1994, Press reception of the December 1995 education policy statement, *Excellence for Everyone: Labour's Crusade to Raise Standards*, widely noted the difference between what was described as 'Old Labour' and 'New Labour' on the one hand, and the similarities between 'Conservatives' and 'New Labour' in respect of policies on teachers, on tests, on failing schools and, to a lesser extent, on Local Education Authorities (e.g. Carvel 1995). *The Times Educational Supplement* greeted the policy document with the headline, 'Blair and Major let Identities Slip' (TES, 1995). It was far from alone in noting that 'both Labour and Conservatives declare education their national priority. Many of their policies also now bear striking similarities' (TES 1995). According to Hackett,

a mark of how far Labour has shifted is that Dr Madsen Pirie of the right wing Adam Smith Institute can claim that the party has taken bold steps in adapting its policies on the need to close failing schools and its stress on the need for parental responsibility (Hackett 1995, in an article headlined 'Labour accused of "teacher-bashing"').

This neo-liberal adulation of Tony Blair has, of course, continued to the present day, in particular with respect to education policy. . New Labour ministers regularly address and are advised by neo-liberal think tanks and gurus such as James Tooley.

During this period, the Hillcole Group spent two years concentrating on collaboratively writing its second book. The book was *Rethinking education and democracy: A socialist alternative for the twenty-first century*. It was written by Pat Ainley, Shane Blackman, John Clay, Mike Cole, Imelda Gardiner, Rosalyn George, Dave Hill, Janet Holland, Ken Jones, Glenn Rikowski, Eric Robinson and Julian Wooton. The blurb for the book is as follows:

The twenty-first century will need an education system very different from that of today. In this book the Hillcole Group takes up the challenge of thinking the truly thinkable to describe a vision of an education system based on principles of equality and democratic accountability to take us into the new millennium. We must move beyond the 30 year war of weak social democratic pragmatism

and rigid conservative dogmatism and their inadequate and unsuccessful solutions for education. Education is for people of all ages, it is a fundamental part of life, not a preparation for life.

We provide the framework for an alternative education based in a society which itself must be changed from the constraints of past thinking into a culture of social entitlement. We apply these principles, drawing out the transformative implications for all levels of education in the current system. Our aim is to provide a radical vision of what education and society could be like in the twenty-first century.

Glenn Rikowski, in his appreciation of Caroline Benn, following her death, was to write,

The eighteen months leading up to the publication of *Rethinking Education and Democracy: A Socialist Alternative for the 21st Century* (1997) was a period of intense debate at our meetings. As Dave Hill has said elsewhere, 'every line was fought over' (Hill, in Cole *et al*, 2001) For those involved in the *Rethinking* project it was an exciting, but exhausting time. The intensity of debate on educational theory, policy, history, principles and practice was experienced to a degree few of us had found elsewhere. This was 'education, education, education', raw and live! Caroline Benn kept this all together, and with Clyde Chitty she ensured that ideas were transformed into text. Caroline played a leading role in welding our debates and ideas into a coherent whole. She was absolutely determined that although individuals held views on education most deeply, a *collective* view emerged. That it did was mainly due to Caroline and the organisational work of Janet Holland. It was whilst we were in the throes of working on *Rethinking* that we discovered that Caroline was seriously ill. Her courage and fortitude in the face of a life-sapping illness amazed and inspired us to share and develop the full range of Caroline's wonderful vision for education in the 21st century.

The process of producing *Rethinking* was democracy in practice, but this process was kept on track principally by Caroline's determination to *make the democratic process work for society's future*. She brought her tremendous wealth of knowledge on comprehensive education and post-compulsory education, her experience and capacity to inspire to focus on *Rethinking*. Caroline mobilised passionate, volatile and committed Hillcole Group members into a united force that could articulate the foundations for a democratic and open education system based on the need for social equality and respect for difference. Caroline related to us after *Rethinking* was published that someone had exclaimed to her: "But how did you get *this* lot to agree!"

For the *Rethinking* project, Caroline sought to ensure that a democratic, collective process that had a place for passion and commitment could 'produce the goods'. We all shared this view. But Caroline's steered the Group through the storm of debate to agree on principles underpinning a truly socialist education for the 21st century. (Rikowski, 2001a).

Publications: Against the Neo-Liberal Agenda

Leftists, Old Labour members and academics either could not believe that New Labour, when finally in government, would actually extend the neo-liberalism and also aspects of the neo-conservatism of the Conservatives. Many, though not all, shared a fairly widespread hope, which can now be seen as quite obviously a naïve hope, that once elected, the Tony Blair/ New Labour push for respectability and for the middle class and suburban vote, would fade and that we would see a move, if not to socialist principles and policies, at least to a social democratic redistributionist set of education and other policies.

Instead, New Labour policies actually extended and deepened the previous Conservative governments' neo-liberal policies, including 'the businessification of education', the deepening of the capitalist agenda for state education (producing an ideologically compliant and technically skilled workforce, diminishing dissent) and the capitalist agenda in state education (making profits from owning it, running it, being consulted on it, and lending PFI money for it). Hillcole published a series of booklets analysing and highlighting these aspects of New Labour's policy (Hill, 1999; Ainley, 2000; Allen *et al*, 2000). With New Labour in government, the Group thus published a new series of booklets (none had been produced after the first flurry of nine booklets in four years, published between 1989 and 1993). Two of these were individual booklets, and one was co-written. All contained not only a critical analysis of New Labour's neo-liberal education policies- their privatising, marketising, (neo-) liberalising ideology- but also proposals for radical Left reform.

The three booklets were

- Dave Hill's (1999) *New Labour and Education: Policy Ideology and the Third Way*,
- Pat Ainley's (2000) *From earning to Learning: what is happening to education and the welfare state*, and
- the booklet co-written by Martin Allen, Caroline Benn, Clyde Chitty, Mike Cole, Richard Hatcher, Nico Hirtt and Glen (2000) *Business, business, business: New Labour's Education Policy*.

Indeed, this analysis became the focus for much of the subsequent work by Hillcole members, both with Tufnell Press (e.g. Rikowski, 2000) and outside (e.g. Hatcher, 2001; Cole, 1998; Hill, 2003, 2004; Jones, 2003; Rikowski, 2001b, 2002, 2003).

A New Strategy: Working with other Left Organisations

In the late 1990s new members, faced with this, the Hillcole Group strategy changed to one of establishing more links with activist groups which were opposing New Labour policy. Under Caroline Benn's influence, new members joined, key individuals joined. For example in phase three in the late 1990s, the group was joined by Martin Allen and Richard Hatcher, who, together with Ken Jones, were activists in the Socialist Teachers Alliance within the National Union of Teachers, and by Eric Robinson and Jackie Lukes, long-time collaborators with Caroline Benn within such left education movements as the Socialist Educational Association- the affiliated education organisation within the Labour Party.

During this period Hillcole participated in and organised a number of activist educational conferences. For example at the Socialist Teachers Association

Conference in November 1997 at Camden Town Hall, London, the Hillcole Group ran a plenary session.

The conference, *Business, Business, Business: New Labour's Education Policy*, was held in October 1999, at The Friends Meeting House Euston Rd., London. Its publicity leaflets announced that it was ***Organised by members of the Hillcole Group of Radical Left Educators*** including: Martin Allen (Socialist Teachers' Alliance, schoolteacher), Caroline Benn, (writer and adult educator), Shane Blackman (University Christchurch College, Canterbury), Clyde Chitty (Forum Magazine and Goldsmiths' College), John Clay (Brighton University), Mike Cole (Brighton University), Rosalyn George (Goldsmiths' College), Imelda Gardiner (schoolteacher), Dave Hill (University College Northampton), Janet Holland (South Bank University), Glenn Rikowski (Birmingham University), Julian Wooton (London schoolteacher).

This conference exemplified the way in which the Hillcole Group was now engaging in collaborative activity with other Left groups and organisations. Thus, the speakers for that conference, and the organisations they were representing, included: Pat Ainley (University of Greenwich), Martin Allen (schoolteacher, Socialist Teachers' Alliance), Caroline Benn (Hillcole Group, writer and adult educator), Christine Blower (schoolteacher, national ex-President NUT), Richard Hatcher (Education and Social Justice, University of Central England), Dave Hill (Hillcole Group and University College Northampton), Rehana Minhas (Haringey LEA), Martin Powell-Davies (schoolteacher, Secretary of the Lewisham NUT), Jan Pollock (NATFHE Rank and File, London City Lit. Institute) and Dexter Whitfield (Centre for Public Services, Sheffield).

As Rikowski has described (2001a)

Imelda Gardiner (who died in May 2000) proposed that the Group organise a further Conference where alternatives to New Labour's education policy would be the focus. Further discussion unfolded the need to bring together the disparate forces of the educational Left in time for the General Election that many experts believed would take place in April or May 2001. Caroline energetically threw herself into this enterprise! Letters were fired off, phone calls made; progress reports back to the Group were voiced at our organising meetings, and Caroline's enthusiasm was a vital spark. Her crucial groundwork was a key condition for the Conference (supported by leading groups and individuals from the educational Left), coming to life, but as one of the Conference's originators and sponsors she never saw its realisation.

And since then, the Hillcole Group network has been involved in conferences organised by the Promoting Comprehensive Education Network (PCEN) such as the February 2001 'The Left & Education Conference: Promoting Comprehensive Education in the 21st Century: From nursery education through to post-16 provision' and the December 2001 Conference, 'Not for sale: Education is for people not profit'. These grew out of the Hillcole meetings held in Caroline Benn's house, but were not Hillcole conferences. (Details of these conferences are online at www.ieps.org.uk)

Martin Allen's testimony to the Hillcole Group is that

I did not become a member of Hillcole until 1998, but was impressed by its commitment to political activity and its willingness to work with other forces

in broader initiatives. For example, Hillcole participated in education conferences organised by the Socialist Teachers Alliance and the 'Promoting Comprehensive Education in the Twenty-First Century' conference which grew out of a meeting at Caroline Benn's house and which sadly, she did not live long enough to be able to participate in.

EVALUATING THE HILLCOLE GROUP

Three Issues

1. The Academic/ Activist Tension

While the balance between our academic activism (writing, critiquing, making policy proposals) and our trade union/ socialist organisation/ Party/ street activist activity has changed individually for each of us at various times in our lives, we all, to one degree or another brought academic and political/union activist experience to our discussions on analysis, policy, strategy and tactics. And we did so in a non-sectarian manner. The group was open to all non-sectarian socialist/ Marxist/ Radical left educators working anywhere in the education system-school teachers, post-16 teachers and higher education teachers. The other proviso and condition for membership was that we were a working group. A writing group, not just a debating group. The debates were essential, but there was an explicit requirement that members would write and contribute, whether through critique or working at the typeface, to written publications and organising activities, such as conferences.

We all, prior to, during and since Hillcole (1989-2000) had our own organisational, activist and ideological trajectories, and while there are valid debates (nineteenth, twentieth, twenty-first century debates) about workerism, intellectualism, vanguardism, one of the strengths of Hillcole was that we were not sectarian in organisational terms, or in terms of positions on/ understandings of the issues mentioned above.

Martin Allen's analysis is that

the activities and the culture of Hillcole also demonstrated the difficulties and contradictions of bridging the divide between the 'academic' left in university education departments and left/socialist currents within teaching unions, such as the STA. While the potential advantage for the academic left is that being spared from many of the demands of 'union work', - leading bread and butter campaigns over workplace issues, writing annual conference resolutions and attending endless meetings- enables them to remain a free thinking and looser coalition, the downside is that members tend to operate within the confines of their own research interests and even those of the higher education institutions they work in. This is not intentional, but a reflection of the material divisions between researchers and practitioners in education.

Mike Cole has pointed out that some academics combine both trade union and other practical political activity, but Martin Allen's point is valid. Perhaps we all, at different historical periods, and at different times in our own lives, repeatedly evaluate where we, with whatever skills and abilities we have, can make most of a difference. Certainly I have only had time to 'be an academic writer', attempting to influence the

academic levels of audience, since I ceased being an elected (*de facto* virtually full-time) local political and trade union representative.

2. Emphasis on Social Class Analysis

The one exception to our relatively harmonious collaboration between people with different political and theoretical trajectories was in the early/ mid 1990s over the question and validity of postmodernism, of postmodern analysis, of the salience of class analysis and the place of gender and 'race' in that analysis.

Gaby Weiner comments:

My thoughts about Hillcole are that I met some great people there and it was a good network to belong to. But ultimately it fractured for some people me included because of the inability of some of the left to incorporate gender, ethnicity and special needs in what was always predominantly a class analysis.

At about that time Mike Cole and I (and subsequently with Glenn Rikowski) (See Cole and Hill, 1995; Cole, Hill and Rikowski, 1997; Hill, McLaren, Cole and Rikowski, 1999, 2003) were starting to critique identitarian postmodernist analyses, their denial of social class, and the then prevailing analysis that social class, 'race' and gender were of equal importance in the analysis and daily experience of work and life.

As Mike Cole points out,

the whole point of Marxist critiques of postmodernisms are precisely that Marxism potentially leads to mass action, locally, nationally and internationally, whereas postmodernism leads to inaction, or action at the local level only. In addition research by 'academics' can lead to 'bread and butter issues', e.g. recommendations to institutions on combating racism in schools

And Glenn Rikowski notes that

If postmodernism was just a harmless academic theory that has no implications for politics it could be conveniently ignored. However, the quietism, relativism, nihilism and solipsism that it engenders gives rise to the sneers at 'old-fashioned' class politics by cool dude postmodernists. In this sense, for those interested in changing the world, it debilitates, whilst also providing a resource for those who just want to 'view the world' rather than to change it. Insofar as postmodernists get involved in education or other forms of politics, then they leave their postmodernism behind (and some, thankfully, do this). Postmodernism also, as Dave, Mike and myself have pointed out many times, acts as a screen to the more substantive and cruel politics of the educational Right.

3. Style of Writing/ Target Audience and Media Coverage

There is always a tension between and over target audience in terms of its political commitment and sophistication, and secondly, in terms of the level of writing- tabloid, academic, or in-between, or both/ all? Were we just navel-gazing and speaking to each other? We certainly did not reach a mass market, we did not actually emulate the success of 'The Black Papers' of the 1960s and 1970s. Pat Ainley comments that 'the Hillcole Group failed to distribute its publications as well as to publicise them'. As a

result, he suggests, 'they were read by a small audience of the already largely converted'.

Pat Ainley continues,

The reasons that the HC failed to achieve this aim are instructive, particularly as initially it had a lot going for it. It gathered a range of talent and expertise across the range of educational research and informed opinion around the unifying figure of Caroline Benn, who was its emotional heart, while Janet Holland, another hard-working and dedicated individual, provided its organisational muscles by keeping meetings minuted and ordered with exemplary efficiency.

Despite this, the most obvious reason for Hillcole's failure to achieve anything more than an extremely limited influence was that it lacked the resources and access to powerful positions for dissemination of its ideas in the establishment media, particularly the right-wing and monopoly-capital owned press that was naturally unsympathetic to its ideas. There was no very effective effort to counter this by systematic work to ensure that HC publications were at least announced and reviewed in the mainstream media and featured in the trade press (*TES*, *Education Guardian* and on BBC education programmes etc).

There was, in fact, effort, and a number of the Hillcole Group were experienced in handling the media. But Rupert Murdoch's Press and the right-wing Press are never going to publish approbatory comments on, or original articles by Marxist educators... unless to vilify them. Perhaps we should have done more in this respect, especially with regard to the liberal Press.

Pat Ainley does go on to acknowledge that

To make up for this, the Hillcole Group at least provided the means to publish quickly and independently, potentially enabling practitioners and pundits – or anyone who was sufficiently steamed up about a particular subject – to write quick and reflective responses to the latest government's initiatives on education and training.

The Hillcole Group: an evaluation

Hillcole can be evaluated in three ways: 1. what it did for its members, 2. what it did for the educational Left, and 3. what it did in terms of analysis and theorising/ explaining and formulating.

1. The Hillcole Group was very effective in giving us, often isolated and sometimes ideologically and professionally beleaguered individuals, organisation, and intellectual, ideological and emotional sustenance. We helped each other- having laughs, joint tactical and strategic enterprises to which we were committed, informing, critiquing, pushing, questioning, clarifying, extending each other's understanding. It was, for a number of the members, invaluable, providing emotional support, intellectual stimulus and nourishment, a shared purpose. Many of us felt isolated and marginalised within our places of work, because of our political, trade union and ideological activity.

And we learned from each other. Richard Hatcher, Ken Jones and Martin Allen brought their STA (Socialist Teachers Association) experience, Caroline Benn and Eric Robinson and Jackie Lukes, their decades of networking, writing and organisation within educational organisations of the Left (such as The Socialist Educational Association) and Caroline's hugely experienced connections with and knowledge of the Left in Education/ the Left and Education. All brought with them their individual histories and biographies. We were all activists.

For individuals in the Group it was important. As Mike Cole says, 'its strengths were its basic democracy and comradeship at the meetings and its uncompromising commitment to democratic socialism'. As Janet Holland says, 'I enjoyed the meetings, and organising them in various places over the years, and particularly enjoyed the discussions of the books, which I think were really democratically and collectively worked on'.

2. What the Hillcole Group did was to establish a presence at a time of demoralisation and problems for the left. It established a point of reference, a symbol of support, for Leftists, socialists and Marxists in education, especially higher education. Mike Cole, in responding to the question, 'what it did and did not do for the educational left 1989-1902', comments, 'surprisingly, since the booklets and books didn't sell many copies, it was quite well known and influential'. Janet Holland continues,

The Hillcole Group was always important to me, and I think it had some influence, as Mike says, despite the pamphlets not necessarily selling well. I think they were read a lot, (i.e. one person buys, more read) like newspapers, though not, obviously, in such large numbers. I also liked the way we were usually right, so to speak.

3. This leads on to the power of the Hillcole analysis. Regarding the theorising/ explanation engaged in by the Hillcole Group, Ken Jones comments, 'I don't think that there was that much that a group like Hillcole could have done to modify these situations, beyond the pamphleteering, some of which was good and provided an early critique of the ERA system'.

Pat Ainley claims that

One respect in which – in substance if not in form – Hillcole publications overcame the typically narrow obscurantism of English academia was that it was able to relate developments in one area of education to others in other areas and to an extent to the wider context of the changing state and the increasingly globalised economy. This is best shown in its publication *Rethinking Education and Democracy, A Socialist Alternative for the Twenty-first Century*, which is perhaps its most enduring contribution.

Hillcole not only tried to overcome ivory tower analysis and obscurantism, it also developed from analysis to policy formulation. Within Hillcole, Caroline and others, in fact the Group as a whole, stressed the need to think beyond the follies of contemporary education policies, to have an effect on policy- and if not policy under a current New Labour government, then a Radical Left policy to play a part in and after its replacement.

As Glenn Rikowski notes (Rikowski, 2001a) 'for Caroline, those who vent criticism and anger at what is happening to our schools, colleges and universities also have a

responsibility to spell out clearly and succinctly what the *alternatives* are. As she noted in her conclusion to the *Business, Business, Business* pamphlet of 1999 (written with Clyde Chitty):

If we on the Left want to help people to trust in the education service in exchange for more developments that are on our terms we have to think these terms out more carefully in order to generate widespread support for an alternative. Every time we criticise changes being made, we must suggest what changes are required instead. It is much harder to do this but that is what the Hillcole Group was formed to do.

Note

* Dave Hill Chaired the Hillcole Group from 1989 to 2000. He is Professor of Education Policy at University College Northampton.

Other than where I have referenced a quote, the quotations from Hillcole Group members are taken from their email responses to my questions to them in preparation for writing this chapter.

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